

5 Plus 1 Equals Eleven by movieholic

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Summary: James Hopper never thought he could love anything or anyone as much as he loved Sara. Then entered Eleven. Five times Jim Hopper expresses his love...and the one time he finally says it out loud.

1. Seat Belt

Jim Hopper impatiently drums the fingers of his left hand against the steering wheel of his Blazer. His right, balled into a fist against the meat of his thigh, twitches before he finally moves it to the breast pocket of his jacket. He taps the soft pack of Camels he hastily shoved in there a few minutes prior, before he finally heaves a sigh, and drops his hand.

He reaches over to fiddle with the temperature knob, cranking it up higher than he's usually comfortable with, then settles back into his seat. After another minute, and no sign of activity from outside the streaked window, he pulls back his sleeves and checks his watch.

"C'mon, Jane," he mutters. He wishes it was around a cigarette, but he's been trying to cut back.

He moves to honk the horn, but the passenger side door finally flies open, and the young girl climbs in with a blast of cold air at her back. She lurches forward, and Hopper has to restrain himself from pulling her back from a supposed fall, but she only grabs the door handle and slams it shut with a shiver. She yanks at her gloves, a little on the larger scale, and then appreciatively places her hands on the vents with a sigh.

"Hey." It's half a greeting, half a way of trying to get her attention. "Hey," he stresses when she doesn't immediately respond. Her dark-eyed gaze finally sweeps up to meet his furrowed brow. Only her gaze is a glare, and apparently Hopper screwed something up. Again. "Jesus, kid, you're too young to start this teenaged angst crap."

His right hand scratches his chest. The Camels shift in his pocket at the movement. He scratches at the wiry hairs on his chin instead.

She, in turn, crosses her arms across her chest and levels him with her patented unimpressed look. With a barely restrained eye roll Hopper turns to face her, placing his right hand against the head of her seat, and lowers his head to meet her glare head-on. He narrows his eyes when she doesn't relent, and licks his lips before smacking them.

"Y'know, we could always just go back inside. Forget this whole 'Thursday dinner' thing all together."

Her nose scrunches up, and he almost expects to see a trickle of blood to start making its way from her flared nostril, but instead she pushes herself back with a put-upon sigh. Hopper rights himself, and exhales himself. He doesn't even know what they're even arguing about this time.

He must be racking his brain too hard for too long, because an impatient voice cuts into his thinking: "Going?"

"What?" He glances over at her in his confusion.

She perks a brow, and he wonders who in the fresh Hell taught her *that* new addition. She points to the steering wheel before resuming her crossed-arm stance. "Still going?"

"Yeah, kid, we're still going." He shakes his head, and moves to place the car in drive, when he notices something just behind her head. Or, rather, the lack of something. "Forget that?"

"Forget what?" Now she's frowning, and he supposes that's slightly better. "No."

"Yes," he drawls as he reaches over her head and snags the seat belt dangling there. He pulls it over her body, clicks it shut, and grunts in approval. "There. That's going to be another rule." He lets this eye roll slip without comment. That one she learned all on her own. "Seat belts. They keep you safe. Jane?"

Despite her initial reaction, he can see that she's tensed up underneath the strap, her hands balled up at either side of her lap. She looks as if she's trying to push herself further back into the seat, trying to create as much space between her body and the strap of fabric in front of her.

His stern gaze softens. "I'm sorry. I didn't think..." he trails off, but doesn't move to undo it. "It really is to keep you safe. Okay? Do you understand?"

It takes her a moment too long to finally nod for his liking, but she

does appear to try and relax against it. "Safe." She looks down at it, tugs experimentally, and then looks over at Hopper. "Safe?" She points to his chest with a curious frown.

He twists his mouth, but relents. "I guess better safe than sorry, huh?" He tugs his own on, adjusts the hat on his head, then places both hands on the wheel.

"Ready, kid?"

She offers him a tentative smile.

"Ready. Dad."

TBC...

Please Review.

2. Wash Up

"Damn it," Hopper cursed as he cradled his hand to his chest. He placed the tip of his thumb in his mouth, and suckled on the aching skin as he finished pulling a tray from the oven. The fries haphazardly tossed on there skittered dangerously across the tinfoil, one or two even falling to the floor, but he managed to toss the tray onto the stove top without further incident.

"Jane?" He called out around his thumb. He pulled it out with a soft *pop*, grimacing at the saliva coating it, and tried again. "Jane? C'mon, kid. Dinner's about ready." He turned to the stove, and glared at the crisp fries. He poked at one. "Maybe too ready," he muttered.

He turned to call out once more, only to be startled into a yelp when he realized that she was already standing behind him. "I need to get you a bell," he grumbled.

She frowned in bemusement, but said nothing as she skirted around him to reach the sink. She stood on tiptoes, nearly losing her footing, but snagged two mismatched glasses and proceeded to fill them with water.

Arms folded across his broad chest, hip resting against the still warm oven, Hopper watched with a soft smile before schooling his face when she turned back again. "Fries are done," he uselessly announced with a jerk of his thumb over his shoulder. "So, we'll just wash up and dig in. Sound good?"

She carefully placed the full glasses on the table before facing him again. "Wash up?"

"Yeah," he clasped his hands together and rubbed them as if to warm them up. "Wash our hands before supper. Before any meal," he amended. "Kind of like how we brush our teeth every day?"

She nodded to indicate she followed so far. "New rule? 'Wash up'?"

"Exactly. Gets all those germs off, so we don't get sick."

"Sick." That word strikes a chord with her, and her knitted brow softens. "Like Sara?"

Hopper tenses up, takes a steadyng breath, and lolls his head. He isn't sure whether he's going for a nod or a shake of his head, and it's clear that Jane doesn't know either. The confused frown returns. "Uh, sort of. What happened to—" He cuts himself off, aches for a Camel or a Tuinol, both of which he's either cut back or cut out, and tries again. "What happened to her wasn't because she didn't wash her hands." It sounded a little stressed, the way he wanted to make sure she understood that not washing up didn't mean you'd die. He scratches his forehead with his thumbnail.

"Okay," she states simply, and goes to the sink at counter. She looks at him expectantly, and he starts when he realizes that was the end of *that* conversation.

He pushes himself away from the stove, grabs the bar of soap set next to the faucet, and holds it out to Jane with a slight grin. "You do the same thing you do when you take a bath."

Hopper realizes his mistake too late when she starts to rub the bar of soap across her forehead, and he has to grab the counter to keep his rumbling laughter from bowling him over. "No, no, sweetheart. Maybe not *quite* like the bath. Here," he plucks the lathered bar from her outstretched hand, and begins to soap up his own.

"See? You do this for, Hell, I dunno. Fifteen, twenty seconds?"

"You count?" She's wiping at the soap suds on her head with a kitchen towel.

"You can," he scrubs underneath his nails, holding his hands up so she can see what he's doing, "Or you can sing."

"Sing?"

"Sure," he shrugs. "Uh, let's see." He bops his head to a song only he can hear, before moving his lips to the words. Finally, he softly grumbles through the words aloud: "Dum, dum, dum. Sweet Caroline," his deep voice carries in the cabin, "Good times never

seemed so good. Sweet Caroline, ba-ba-ba. I believe they *never* could..." He trails off, rinses his hands, and looks down at Jane.

She's clutching the towel to her chest as if she's seen something scandalous. In her defense, Hopper thinks, she probably has. He rolls his eyes, places a hand on her thick curls, and tousles them affectionately. "Wash up, kid, and dig in."

Jane grins up at him, going so far as to swat at his hip with the towel, and grabs the bar of soap.

Hopper snags a fry, chokes down the overdone potato with a grimace, and listens as his daughter softly croons to "Sweet Caroline."

TBC...

Please Review.

3. Watch Your Step

"Whoa, whoa, whoa!" A heavy hand snags the material of her jacket, the seams protesting at the rough movement, but it does stop Jane Hopper from toppling headfirst into a river bend. "Jesus, watch your step, kid. We almost lost ya there." The hand moves to brush the clods of dirt it left behind on her shoulder, then rests there. "Good?"

She meets her father's worried gaze as he kneels in front of her. His blue eyes, usually hidden beneath the brim of his hat, peak from underneath his heavy brow instead. The corner of her mouth perks up, and she places her hand atop of his. "I am good."

The worry lines melt from his face, and mold into something resembling a smile. He looks tired, but being the Chief of Police "does that to you." So says the Party, and she's inclined to agree. He pulls her from her thoughts with a tug of one of her thick curls. "Good. Hate to lose ya before the inevitable board game fiasco."

"Hey!" A woman's voice protests from somewhere behind Hopper's large frame as he straightens up, and he has the good grace to grimace. "They are *not* a fiasco. You're just a sore loser, Hop." Joyce appears, comically dwarfed by the sheer size of the Chief, with brown eyes wide in sudden concern. "You okay, sweetie?"

"Fine," she replies with a punctuated nod. A throat being cleared pulls her from her navel-gazing, and she adds: "Thank you." The look of approval is fine, but she thinks the flashed thumbs up is slightly overkill. She directs their attention to her sneakers instead, pointing at the already well-worn set of Converse she had only just been gifted a few months ago. The shoelace of one is muddied and hanging limply on the ground. "Lace came undone. I got clumsy."

Hopper's mouth twists up into a proud smile. "Clumsy, huh? I see you learned a new word." He shoves his hands into the pockets of his jacket, glancing fondly at Joyce when she places her hand on his bicep before moving away to check on Will. Jane smirks at the gesture. Hopper narrows his eyes in response. "Can it. You know that expression?"

"I already do, yes." She smirks at his glower. "I also learned the word 'oblivious' today."

"Oh, yeah?" Hopper's expression goes from mildly annoyed to flat. He knows what's coming up next, and he's not quite feeling *that* conversation. Again. "Is that the one that means mind your own business?"

Jane scrunches up her nose. "It means-"

"Nah, uh-uh." Hop wrestles a hand from within his pocket to raise it, as if to physically stop the words from spilling over. "I was being sarcastic." He pinches the bridge of his nose as he huffs out a laugh. "Now that is a word you definitely know."

She puffs out her cheeks in exasperation. "We just don't understand why-"

"We?!" Great, now he's doing the squinty-eyed thing. He jerks a thumb over one of his broad shoulders. "You mean you and Will? Listen, kid, you don't need to understand. Hell, I barely understand." The last part is muttered to himself, but he regains his composure and starts again. "It's comp-" His hand curls in the air. "It's none of your-"

"Business." She smirks when he falters.

He glowers down at her, and she beams right back up at him. It takes a moment longer than she'd like, but he finally relents by squaring his shoulders and jerking his chin back towards their make-shift camp site. "C'mon, brat. Watch your step. Don't need you cracking your damn head on any rocks today."

Jane scampers to his side, and nudges him in the softness of his belly with her elbow. He grunts, looks down, and curls his lip upward at her offered hand. He gently grasps it within his much larger one, and points with his free one to a particularly large rock.

"Careful. I need you in one piece."

She looks up at him from underneath long lashes.

"For the board games?"

She can hear him audibly swallow over their steps.

"No," his hand squeezes hers, "For more than just that."

TBC...

Please Review.

4. Eat Your Veggies

The comfortable silence was broken by a sharp tap of metal against porcelain. Jane, startled, quickly looked up from where she was staring at her plate to watch as Hopper was settling back in his seat from across the dining table. She thought he hadn't noticed, but of course he did: she had happily devoured the overcooked meatloaf, and over zealously inhaled her buttered slice of bread...but she just couldn't get herself to stomach the steamed broccoli.

He lifted a brow, then motioned towards her plate with the fork he had just used. He pushed whatever food was in his mouth to his cheek, and spoke around the mound. "It's not gonna magically disappear if you keep starin' at it."

"Oh, Hop, it's okay." Joyce cast Jane a reassuring smile. "Really." She cut into her own meatloaf, took a bite, and grimaced at the texture. She gestured towards the meat with her knife. "We're lucky she even ate the main course."

Hopper swung his head toward Joyce. He swallowed his food, hiding his wince rather well, before protesting. "C'mon, Joyce. It was delicious." He leaned forward, placing an elbow on the tabletop, and continued. "Besides, that's not the point. She needs to learn to eat her vegetables."

"*She* can hear you," the young teen muttered underneath her breath. She felt rather than saw the warning scowl Hopper sent her way, and instead picked at the little green trees glumly.

"Then *she* can sit here until every last bite of broccoli is gone." The patented glare was sent in his direction, but Hopper didn't back down. Instead, he grabbed his plate and stood up. He managed to take a step towards the sink, before he paused and turned back around. "I mean eaten," he said firmly, priding himself for clarifying when the tiny smirk at the edge of her lips vanished. "By you."

Will, who was quietly stuffing his face at the remaining seat at the table, snickered at her crestfallen expression. He reached over to pat her on the shoulder. "It was a good try, though."

"Don't encourage her," Joyce laughed before Hopper could turn to lecture him too. The larger man grumbled to himself as he rinsed his plate.

"Why? It's gross." Jane wrinkled her nose, and pushed at the veggies again.

"Because they're good for you, sweetie." Joyce reached over to pat the top of her hand. The younger woman couldn't help but smile back. The Byers were all about reassuring pats.

"That," Hopper said as he lathered his plate, "And they'll make you big and strong."

Jane pushed her plate away at that, and Hopper frowned. "I am strong." She tapped her temple. "Up here."

"Of course you are," Joyce agreed brightly, casting Hopper an indecipherable look. "But it's also important to make sure your body is strong too."

"I don't want to be a giant, though." Jane frowned, and folded her thin arms across her chest. Hopper, confused, turned off the tap and set the plate down. "What are you talking about, kid?" He grabbed a dishtowel, dried his hands on them, and took a knee by her seat. "They're not going to make you ten feet tall or anything. They're just providing your body with, uh, energy and crap."

"Nutrients," Joyce chimed in.

"Yeah, and fibers. I think." Hopper scratched the back of his head sheepishly. "I didn't really listen to the doc..." he trailed off, and placed a giant hand on her shoulder. "Just eat the veggies, kid. It's healthy, and you being healthy is very, very important to me. Okay?" He dipped his head to meet her sullen gaze with his eyes. "O-kay?"

She sighed in defeat, snatched up her fork, and offered him a curt nod. "Okay."

"Good," he grinned and stood back up.

The sink taps creaked as Hopper turned them back on, and resumed

washing his dishes. The rest of the 'Thursday Dinner' evening proceeded as normal, until Jane cleared her throat and motioned towards Hop's middle.

"I meant fat. Not giant." She offered Hopper a toothy grin. "Like you, dad."

Joyce's guffaw of laughter rang out over Hop's meaningless threat.

TBC...

Please Review.

5. Get Some Rest

This late into the evening, Hopper wishes he didn't have to bother with the special knock on the front door, but he doesn't have a way of undoing all the chains from the outside. So, he proceeds as normal, resting his forehead against the grain as he waits for Jane to let him in. It takes a moment, and Hopper feels guilty for bothering the kid.

"Hey," he tiredly greets the teen aloud. "Sorry I'm late." He shrugs out of his jacket, misses the coat rack twice, before he tosses it onto the back of the couch. "I hope you got my message," he continues, but mostly in a grumble as he heads towards the fridge and pulls out a can of Schlitz. The can pops open easily; the foam sucked into Hop's waiting mouth with a soft moan of appreciation.

Wiping his mouth with the back of his right hand, Hop shuffles towards the couch as his left hand starts to unbutton his work shirt. He glances at the half-open door of the sole bedroom as he lets the weight of his body pull him down to the cushions. The couch squeaks slightly in protest, but his audible exhalation covers the noise.

"Jane?"

The furniture barely accommodates his large frame, so he slouches further down, and cranes his neck awkwardly so that he can still peer pass the door. There's an off-white twinkle emanating from the string of lights in her bedroom, and they catch his sore eyes off guard.

He lifts his head slightly, ignoring the dull ache the pull of muscles cause, and frowns. "You okay in there? I see the lights are on."

The door swings open slowly, and the teen steps out into the living area rubbing at her eyes. "Tired," she complains softly. Despite his concern, Hopper can't help an endearing smile at the sight Jane makes. Her hair is a mess of curls sticking out in every direction, and the left pant leg of her pajama bottoms are hiked up to her mid-calf.

He takes a large gulp of his beer, and closes his eyes. "Yeah, I'm sorry about that."

"Not me," she shakes her mane of curls, but he doesn't notice. "You. You're tired."

The bark of laughter that escapes his lips is an accident, so he waves a hand in the air in her general direction before scrubbing at his face. "Yeah, yeah I am." A wide, jaw-cracking yawn erupts from him as if to prove the point. "But I'm home now, kid. So, go on ahead and get back to bed. You need your rest."

"So do you," she retorts, and Hopper winces at the bite in it. He cracks open an eyelid, but she pushes on. "You work, and work, and work all day, and then you come home and take care of me. But no one takes care of you."

"I'm fine," he sighs, but pushes himself up. "Really. I'm fine. I'm just tired, is all. I just need some sleep, and," he digs an elbow into the couch and shoves himself up to his feet, "So do you, young lady. It's as important as broccoli." He finishes off the can, places it onto the coffee table, and walks over to her. He places both hands on her shoulders, and lowers his head to meet her eyes. "C'mon. I'll tuck ya in."

"Only if you promise to stay."

"What?"

"Only if you promise to *stay*," she stresses.

Hopper hangs his head for a moment, but relents with a shrug. "Fine." He gently pushes against her upper half, and she follows the movement back into the room. She climbs into the bed first, back against the wall, and pulls the covers to her chin. She watches fondly as Hopper maneuvers his larger body onto the opposite half, giggling in the semi-dark as the mattress dips under his weight.

"I'm not fat," he whispers in mock anger, but his soft grin belies the tone. He toes off his boots, pulls his work shirt off and leaves the Henley on. He settles back, forgoing any sheets, and sighs heavily. "Get some rest, yeah?"

"You too," she murmurs. She closes her eyes, and touches upon her

ability to ease the older man into a deep slumber. The bloodstain on her pillowcase will be well worth it in the morning. "Love you."

His response is a rumbling snore.

TBC...

Please Review.

6. I Love You

White-gray smoke fills the space in between Joyce and Hopper's too close bodies. They're sitting at her dining room table, chairs pulled together as if they're conspiratorially whispering to one another, and maybe they are. Jane doesn't get any closer to find out, and she's not too sure if their oddly intimate moment is something that she wants to be the one to tread on.

Instead, she pulls away from the scene and forgoes the glass of water she had initially gone to get for a handful from the bathroom tap. Satiated, she heads back to Will's room, and timidly knocks on the door. She only just left him a moment ago, but he doesn't like to be surprised anymore than she does. She enters when he calls out for her to come in.

"That was quick," he questions with a downturn of his lips. He just had his nose shoved into a comic book, but he holds it off to the side in favor of a conversation with her. "Something happen?"

Jane bites the inside of her lip. "I don't know."

"You don't know?" He says slowly, and now the comic book is completely lowered to the comforter of his bed. "Is it the Chief?" His brown eyes widen, and he leans forward in a panic. "Is it *mom*? Is she okay?"

"More than okay, I think. They were sitting close." She plops herself down onto the edge of his bed. She squints in a fashion very reminiscent of her father. "Very close. It looked..." She trails off with a mild frown. The word is there, but she's struggling to find it until "Intimate."

"Intimate?" Will is a parrot, apparently, and Jane is only amused by this fact. It's better than Mike and his remarkable aptitude for repeating himself immediately after just saying something. Though, despite that minor flaw, she adores the boy deeply.

She nods quickly. "They were really, really close. Whispering. But it didn't look like bad whispering. Dad was smiling." A smile of her own

lights up her face. He didn't do it often enough, and Jane thought that it was downright criminal.

"Do you think he said the 'L' word?" Will is fully leaning forward now, eyes alight and fully eager to squeeze the gossip from the other teen.

"What is that? The 'L' word?" Despite her progress in speaking full sentences, she still spoke haltingly when confronted with new terms and words she didn't recognize.

Will, unbothered by that fact, lowered his voice and looked around covertly. "It stands for love."

"Oh," Jane sagged in relief. "He says it all the time."

"To my mom!?" Will's eyes seemingly bug from his head, but he has the grace to wince at the volume of his voice.

"I don't know," she replies with a roll of her shoulders. "But he says it to me a lot."

"Really?" The boy visibly deflates, and the conversation seems to take a different tone. He picks at his jeans without looking up. "Lonnie never said it to me."

"Well," she amends. "He sort of says it. He doesn't use the word all the time. But I hear it." She folds her lanky arms across her chest, pushes her lower lip out in a scowl, and adopts a gruff voice that has Will silently clutching his side in sudden laughter. "Put your seat belt on. Jesus! Wash your hands. Don't trip. Eat your veggies, kid. Go to bed." She wags a stern finger, but dissolves into giggles alongside Will. "He doesn't have to use the word for me to know what he means."

"That's so cool." He says it as if it's part of her abilities, and not something he too endures all the time. Especially these days. "I mean, mom says it *all* the time. Obviously. I just sometimes wish I had a dad that would say it too. Y'know?"

"I have a mom," Jane admits softly. "But she's gone." She taps her temple gently. "Up here. I wish I had one like yours."

They're quiet for a moment, both thinking of their sole parental

figures, when a sharp knock on the bedroom door causes them to both jump. Joyce's mess of hair pokes in before her beaming face does. "Hey, kiddos. Pizza's here. Come and get it while it's hot." She's gone before either of them can reply. Will shakes his head, but he's grinning after her anyway.

They clamber off the bed, ready to chow down, but pause in the doorway simultaneously. They grin at one another, both on the same line of thought, before slowly creeping down the hall and towards the kitchen. Hopper's rumbling voice is felt more than heard, but Joyce seems to be the one doing all the talking anyway.

"-and I love you, you idiot. Every ounce of you. So, quit your whining, grab a slice, and start your diet tomorrow. Okay?"

There's a pregnant pause, a shuffling of feet, then: "I love you too, Joyce."

Will and Jane high-five around the corner. A throat is cleared awkwardly, and it's not from either of them. So, it startles the two teens when Hopper's gruff voice suddenly says:

"And I love you too, Miss Hopper. Now quit eavesdroppin' and grab some food."

The End.

Thank You.